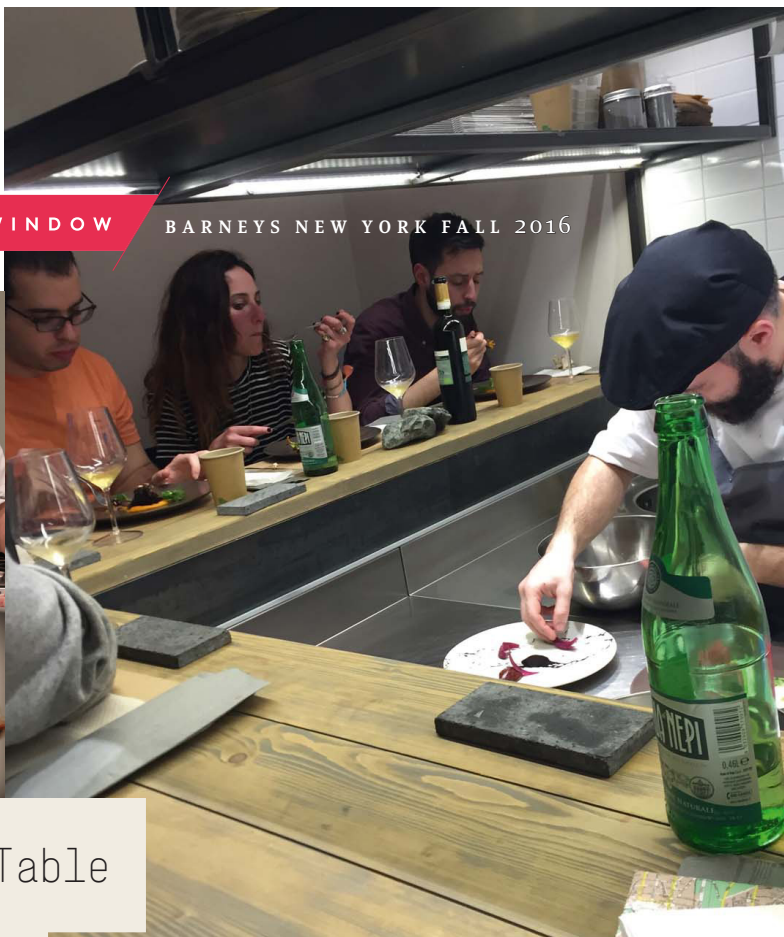
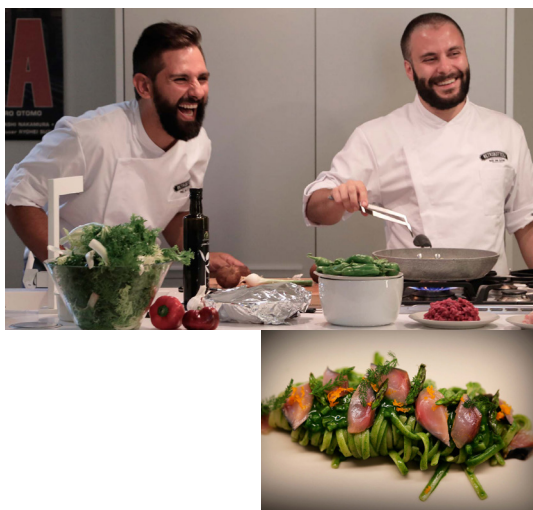


FOOD

THE WINDOW

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## Chef to Table

**Retrobottega**
**ROME'S LATEST CULINARY SUCCESS HAS  
NO NEED FOR A MIDDLEMAN.**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARLOTTA BENVENUTI

WITHIN FOUR MONTHS of its January 2016 opening, Retrobottega, a 30-seat restaurant on Via della Stelletta in Rome, doubled its number of employees—a remarkable accomplishment considering it does not employ a single front-of-house staff member. All new hires are chefs. “I don’t want to be rude to waiters,” chef Giuseppe Lo Iudice says. “I like waiters. They’re just not the most important thing in a restaurant.” For Lo Iudice, and the three other founding chefs, the conceit was to pare down anything that might distract patrons from the food. “We try to concentrate on what is being cooked, what’s on the plates,” he says, “and to leave everything that is not in the kitchen as secondary.”

With no waiters, it’s up to the chefs to advise and interact with the customers

across the open kitchen. Patrons seat themselves at high steel and wood tables, set their own places with cutlery and glasses provided in nearby drawers, and grab drinks from a large refrigerator located in the center of the stripped-down, modern space. The day’s menu, which may include fried sweetbreads, truffle risotto, turbot, veal chop gratin, a half pigeon, or chocolate mousse with citrus, is written in English and Italian on a large board. But it’s not sacrosanct. Diners may even get a hot tip on an off-menu ingredient, which will more than likely find its way into many of the day’s dishes. “Everything gets onto the plate,” Lo Iudice says. “For example, with a pigeon, we’ll cook the interiors and serve it one way. We’ll cook the bones for the juice. Every part of every ingredient has a destination.”

The quality of Retrobottega’s meats and produce has become central to its success. “We work a lot with suppliers, and our vegetables are all local,” says Lo Iudice. “The fish is also sourced locally, but the meats are found all over Italy. We try to source everything as close as possible.”

As one of the city’s most popular spots for lunch and dinner, Retrobottega is at the vanguard of Italy’s new culinary age of informal dining, leading the movement to reestablish the capital as a food destination under new terms. “I like Rome,” Lo Iudice says, “and I think it’s nice to support your own country with new ideas you have seen around the world—to try to do something that you like that inspires and also gives a little fresh air to your own city.”

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